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Spotlight on spying

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WASHINGTON—By every standard, it has been a most unusual year in the espionage business.

The FBI has bagged alleged spies, nearly all Americans, working not only for the Soviet Union, but also for China, Ghana and even a staunch ally, Israel.

Since Thursday alone, the FBI has made four arrests, a phenomenal number considering that normally months go by without even one espionage arrest.



Larry Wu-tai Chin

Last Thursday, for instance, Jonathan Pollard, 31, a Naval Investigative Service counter-intelligence analyst, was arrested outside the Israeli Embassy and charged with spying for America's only real ally in the Mideast. His wife, Anne, was nabbed the next day on lesser charges of possessing classified material.

Officials maintain that what on the surface seems a dangerous trend in home-grown espionage may actually reflect more and better surveillance within America's own spy shops. It also reflects a new hard line that sometimes rejects the notion of trying to "turn" a spy into a covert counterspy for the U.S. in favor of announcing the discovery of the spy to set an example.

On Saturday, Larry Wu-tai Chin, 63, a naturalized citizen who retired as a CIA analyst four years earlier, was charged with spying for China—for more than 30 years.

And yesterday, FBI agents bagged Ronald Pelton, a former communications specialist for the supersecret National Security Agency, at a hotel in Annapolis, Md., 30 miles from NSA headquarters at Fort Meade.

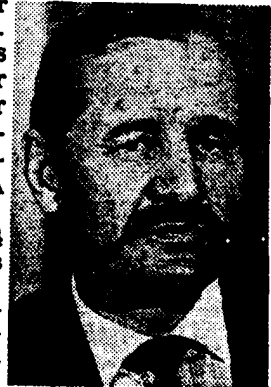
In all, there have been 14 spying arrests this year. What's going on?

Vitaly Yurchenko, the high-ranking Soviet intelligence official who defected to the U.S., can take some of the credit.

Officials say Yurchenko, who had a change of heart and returned to the Soviet Union earlier this month, fingered Pelton and Edward Lee Howard, a former CIA analyst who was fired from the agency in 1963 and fled to Europe.

FBI officials say that there is no Yurchenko connection with the other recent headline-making cases. It's just a coincidence that they were wrapped up at the same time.

"We've just been doing what we do all along," said an FBI official. "We keep evolving, getting better; the technology is better."



Vitaly Yurchenko